

Romare Bearden



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With this stamp sheet, the U.S. Postal Service honors Romare Bearden, one of the 20th century's most distinguished American artists. Bearden is celebrated for his groundbreaking approach to collage along with his work in watercolors, oils, and other media. His art has also been praised for depicting African-American experience in its full dimensions and is in the permanent collections of major museums across the nation.

Art director Derry Noyes chose a different work by Bearden for each of four stamp designs. In order as they appear on the sheet from left to right, in four vertical columns of four stamps apiece, the works depicted are described below.

Conjunction (1971), a collage of various fabrics with crayon and charcoal on canvas, is a large work showing a Southern social scene, reflecting Bearden's recollections of his early childhood in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. The work celebrates the human activity of connecting through touch and conversation, and pays homage to the Southern quilt-making tradition suggested by the fabrics of the women's brightly patterned dresses.

Odysseus: Poseidon, The Sea God—Enemy of Odysseus (1977), a collage of various papers with foil, paint, ink, and graphite on fiberboard, is one of many images by Bearden based on literary sources. Poseidon was the archenemy of Odysseus in Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*; his image here combines mythic qualities with multicultural crosscurrents to suggest a larger narrative revealing a deep exploration of the human condition.

Prevalence of Ritual: Conjur Woman, a collage of various papers with foil, ink, and graphite on cardboard, is one of a series of important collages from 1964. The power and dignity of the black woman was a central theme in Bearden's art, and the spiritual and mysterious "conjur" woman was a recurring subject. Bearden's repeated use and reinvention of motifs finds a parallel in the theme and variation of jazz music, which was an important influence on the artist.

Falling Star (1979) is a collage of various papers with paint, ink, and graphite on fiberboard. This image juxtaposes the ordinary, a domestic interior, with the marvelous, as seen through its windows. The falling star is a metaphor with a variety of references in art, literature, and music, and Bearden

embraces these multiple meanings for the enrichment they provide to his own art. The process of layering these meanings serves as a metaphor for human experience.

The selvage features a photograph of Bearden working on a version of Conversation II, based on Conjunction, taken by Frank Stewart in the early 1980s. The photo has been cropped to fit in the space available in the selvage.

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